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## **'Tomás Luis de Victoria's role in the development of a Roman polychoral idiom in the 1570s and early 1580s'**

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During his years in Rome Tomás Luis de Victoria made a significant contribution to the development of what might best be described as the Roman dialect of a pan-European polychoral idiom. Music for two and three choirs forms an important part of his printed musical legacy and his role in this area has not always in the past been given the credit which is its due. This is also true of the Roman polychoral idiom generally which has tended historically to be played down in favour of the Venetian version. Polychoral music was, however, every bit as important and as ubiquitous in Rome as it was in Venice in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Of the five composers who played a major part in its early Roman incarnation in the late 1560s and 1570s, three were foreigners (Giovanni Animuccia from Florence, Jean de Macque from Flanders and Victoria from Spain). The other two, Annibale Zoilo and Giovanni P. da Palestrina, were both from Rome or its environs. Of these five we can regard the triumvirate of Animuccia, Palestrina and Victoria as making up the earliest wave, starting in the late 1560s, with Zoilo and Macque coming to prominence in the late 1570s and early 1580s.

The earliest publication by a Rome-based composer to have music with recognisably polychoral elements was Giovanni Animuccia's *Il Secondo Libro delle Laudi*, published in Rome by Valerio Dorico in 1570. Animuccia had come to Rome from Florence in c. 1550, joining a flourishing community of Florentine exiles which included Filippo Neri, who was to found the Congregation of the Oratory and who re-invigorated the practice of singing *laude spirituali* at his meetings, held both indoors and out of doors.<sup>2</sup> We can imagine that Animuccia would have kept in touch with his native city through the continually-changing Florentine community based around the church of S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini and its associated Arciconfraternita della Pietà dei Fiorentini. We can presume that he would have been aware of musical developments in Florence which, as Davitt Moroney has recently pointed out, brought forth a number of works for multiple choir including Alessandro Striggio's *Missa sopra Ecco si beato giorno* for forty and sixty voices composed by January 1567.<sup>3</sup> We can thus see Florence as a significant centre for the early development of the polychoral idiom whose influence could have reached Rome through Animuccia.

Animuccia's 1570 *laude* print was most unusual for the period. *Laude* collections generally tended to be for three or four voices in a largely-homophonic texture, analogous to *falsobordone*, the improvised harmony sung by two or three parts around a plainchant. The 1570 print, on the other hand, included nineteen pieces for eight voices with both Latin (twelve) and Italian (seven) texts. Of the Latin pieces, five are psalm-motets, four are Marian antiphons, two are settings of Gospel texts with a dialogue element and there is a setting of the *Pater noster*.<sup>4</sup> It was specifically aimed at the more aristocratic art-

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<sup>1</sup> O'REGAN, Noel. *Sacred Polychoral Music in Rome*. Unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> 'Animuccia', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Stanley Sadie (ed.). London, MacMillan, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> MORONEY, Davitt, «Alessandro Striggio's Mass in Forty and Sixty Parts». En: *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, LX (2007), pp. 1-70.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Animuccia's 1570 eight-voice pieces see O'REGAN, *Sacred Polychoral*, pp. 145-159. The psalm-motets are discussed in O'REGAN, Noel, «Why should we sing the Lord's song in a strange

music-appreciating Romans who were attending Neri's gatherings. The timing of this publication is significant: in the wake of the Council of Trent and in the papacy of the austere Pius V (1565-72), devotion became fashionable and, in many cases, necessary for advancement. That is not to say that everyone's motives were suspect, but the marrying of sophisticated art music and the popular *lauda* tradition certainly gives a sense that Neri and Animuccia were trying to cope with an influx of patricians into what had hitherto been simple devotional gatherings. In fact Animuccia's experiment seems not to have been a success and subsequent *laude* publications, edited by Francisco Soto after Animuccia's death in 1571, reverted to the simple few-voiced formula.<sup>5</sup>

In his 1570 print Animuccia essentially used two approaches to writing eight-voice music. He either composed for two consistently separate choirs which were combined only at the end of the piece and then merged into a single homogenous eight-voice texture. Alternatively he wrote for all eight voices from the start, continually varying the voice-groupings across what was only a nominal division into two choirs. His first approach was particularly suited to the dialogue texts he set, for example *Venit Jesus in civitatem Samariae* (the Gospel text for the third Friday in Lent), where a relatively consistent breakdown into two choirs is used to characterise the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. The second approach worked well for antiphonal texts like the *Salve Regina* where successive verses use combinations of four and six voices without any consistent alternate grouping. The piece which comes closest to what was to become the standard *cori spezzati* idiom is his setting of the *Pater noster*, seen in Example 1: this has two recognisable equally-cleffed choirs in antiphonal exchange but individual voices frequently break away from one group to join the other one, or to regroup with other voices. This setting was, in fact, the subject of a reworking in the early 1580s which tidied up the overlaps between the choirs and reorganised stray voices to produce a properly polychoral piece.<sup>6</sup> Animuccia applied the same approaches to his Italian-texted eight-voice *laude*.

Palestrina's first experiments in a quasi-polychoral style were published in his *Motectorum* 5,6,8vv, *liber secundus* of 1572. It is difficult to know the context for which these pieces might have been composed. They are four psalm-motets, without doxologies and though one of them, *Laudate Dominum*, is a Vespers psalm, they seem to have been conceived for devotional rather than liturgical use, like the Latin music in Animuccia's 1570. They could possibly have been composed for use at Filippo Neri's *oratorio vespertino*, though there is no evidence for this, or perhaps for an analogous gathering at the Jesuit-run Seminario Romano, where Palestrina was *maestro di cappella* up to 1571. They seem unlikely to have been composed specifically for the Cappella Giulia to which Palestrina only returned, after Animuccia's death, in April 1571. Palestrina's approach is similar to the second of Animuccia's two described above, particularly that used in the latter's setting of the *Pater noster*. There is the same underlying sense of two equal choral groups but this is continually being subverted by regrouping into other combinations of voices. Of the four, *Laudate Dominum* comes closest to being a *cori spezzati* piece, as seen in Example 2, and it too was the subject of reworking in the early 1580s to make it

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land. Victoria's psalm settings composed for Rome», paper read to the Congreso Internacional «Pro Victoria». IV Centenario de la muerte de Tomás Luis de Victoria. León, del 8 al 12 de Noviembre de 2011.

<sup>5</sup> ROSTIROLLA, Giancarlo, ZARDIN, Danilo, MISCHIATI, Oscar. *La lauda spirituale tra Cinque e Seicento: Poesie e canti devozionale nell'Italia della Contrariforma* (Rome, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Both versions are given in O'REGAN, *Sacred Polychoral*, vol. 2, pp. 73-85. See also O'REGAN, Noel. «The early polychoral music of Orlando di Lasso: new light from Roman sources». En: *Acta Musicologica*, LVI, 1984, pp. 234-251.

performable by two separate choirs.<sup>7</sup> Palestrina must have been familiar with Animuccia's compositions and was also involved in a musical exchange between Rome and Munich in 1566 which might have brought eight-voice pieces in a similar vein to those of Palestrina's 1572 print to Rome. Three such pieces, published by Lassus in the 1560s, were also the subject of revision in Rome to make them consistently polychoral.<sup>8</sup>

Among those who could have attended Filippo Neri's gatherings in the late 1560s when Animuccia's eight-voice music was being sung might well have been the young Victoria, though we have no direct evidence for this. Certainly, by the time he left Rome, Victoria was close to Neri but we don't know when he started to attend the latter's meetings.<sup>9</sup> In any case he too published a quasi-polychoral piece in 1572: the eight-voice *Ave Maria* which comes at the end of his *Motecta totius anni* of that year; an excerpt is shown in Example 3. In style it resembles Animuccia's *Pater noster* and Palestrina's *Laudate Dominum*: like them it comes close to having two separately-defined choirs, while breaking out into other groups on a regular basis. As with Palestrina, we don't know the context for which this setting might have been originally written: it could conceivably have been for Neri's gatherings or for a patronal feastday celebration at S. Maria di Monserrato where Victoria had a part-time position.<sup>10</sup>

As well as the music of Animuccia, Victoria might have known Francisco Guerrero's eight-voice setting of the *Ave Maria* published, like Victoria's 1572 *Motecta*, by Gardano in Venice in 1570. Like Victoria's print, Guerrero's *Motteta*, 4,5 6vv of 1570 ends with an eight-voice *Ave Maria* setting.<sup>11</sup> While not musically related there are a lot of similarities in the structuring of these two settings of the same text. If the two *altus* parts in Guerrero's setting are rearranged it becomes a largely double-choir piece, though with voices from one or other choir interchanging with each other in places, as in Victoria's setting. Example 4 shows the opening and Example 5 the beginning of the second section, 'Sancta Maria ora pro nobis'. This last is particularly like Victoria's 1572 setting of the same words shown in Example 6. Guerrero's *Motteta* was dedicated to Pope Pius V and a copy survives in the Fondo Cappella Sistina in the Vatican Library which is presumably a presentation copy by the composer.<sup>12</sup> We do not know whether or not Victoria knew this publication and its contents<sup>13</sup> but there are certainly similarities in layout between it and the younger composer's 1572 *Motecta*.

The years 1570-2 thus saw similar settings by three Rome-based composers plus Guerrero's *Ave Maria*. In all cases it is clear that separation of choirs was not a priority or a strong feature at this stage.

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<sup>7</sup> O'REGAN, «The early polychoral music».

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> FILIPPI, Daniele. *Tomás Luis de Victoria*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2008, pp. 37-38.

<sup>10</sup> O'REGAN, Noel. «Tomas Luis de Victoria's Roman churches revisited». En: *Early Music XXVIII* (2000), pp. 403-418.

<sup>11</sup> The *Ave Maria* is preceded by an eight-voice *Pater Noster* which was originally published in Guerrero's *Sacrarum Cantionum*, Seville, Martinus a Montesdoca, 1555; it is a canonic piece but is not polychoral.

<sup>12</sup> LLORENS, José María. Guerrero had previously sent Pope Pius a copy of his *Liber Primus Missarum* (Paris, Nicholas du Chemin, 1566) and had received a letter of acknowledgement. See the Introduction to GUERRERO, Francisco. *Francisco Guerrero. Opera Omnia*, volumen III, Motetes I-XXII. José María Llorens Cisteró (ed.). Barcelona, Instituto Español de Musicología, 1978.

<sup>13</sup> Guerrero's publication does not appear in the inventory of the Roman church of S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli, for instance. See O'REGAN, Noel. «Music prints by Cristóbal de Morales and Tomás Luis de Victoria in surviving Roman inventories and archival records», *Pure Gold: Golden Age Sacred Music in the Iberian World. A Homage to Bruno Turner*, Tess Knighton and Bernadette Nelson (eds.), Kassel, Reichenberger, 2011, pp. 113-131.

Rather these pieces show a desire not to be confined within the limits of two equally-cleffed divisions of the voices. The singers cannot have been physically separated from each other, or these changing groupings would not have worked. There was clearly no question of performing on separate platforms at this stage, as was to become the norm in later years.

What happened to polychoral music in Rome in the ensuing five years was significant: it seems that Palestrina and Victoria took somewhat different paths which probably reflect their different employment circumstances. In 1575 Palestrina published six pieces for double choir at the end of his *Motettorum 5,6,8vv, liber tertius*.<sup>14</sup> Here the choirs are almost completely independent with bass parts which function as two separate fundamental basses; in five of the six pieces, the bass parts do not have the fifth of the harmony which means that the choirs could be placed quite some distance apart. Even in tutti passages the independence of the two choirs is largely maintained. There are almost no sections for reduced voices, rather a continuous use of antiphonal textures; in the *Ave Regina* setting, however, the first three verses are set for individual choirs, though these run directly into each other without a break. Two of the pieces set sequence texts, there is one psalm with doxology (*Jubilate Deo*, not commonly used liturgically), one Marian antiphon and two Christmastide motets. It is conceivable that the inspiration for three of these settings might have been the Holy or Jubilee Year of 1575 when St. Peter's was at the heart of a concerted effort by Pope Gregory XIII to impress the world's Christians after the previous two less than successful holy years. This could have also have provided the incentive for the move by Palestrina to full *cori spezzati* settings at this time.

The following year Victoria published his first four proper double-choir pieces.<sup>15</sup> Two were Marian antiphons, *Regina Coeli* and *Salve Regina*; there was a Vespers psalm with doxology, *Nisi Dominus*, and a psalm-motet, setting the first five verses of Ps. 136, *Super flumina Babylonis*. Victoria was by now *Moderator Musicae* at the German College and its adjunct church of S. Appollinare. He was writing almost entirely for student choirs in a relatively small church and this may be the reason why his settings retain considerable flexibility over those of Palestrina, who was writing for a professional choir in the retained nave of the old basilica of St. Peter's. In three of Victoria's four pieces whole verses are written for single choir or for other combinations of voices and the two bass lines are not harmonically independent, not always avoiding the fifth of the harmony. This implies that they were not composed for spatially-separated *cori spezzati*. At the same time, as Klaus Fischer has pointed out, the texture is largely homophonic and, while Victoria does make some use of anticipated or retarded entries at takeover points between the choirs, these do not interfere with the basic integrity of the two choirs.<sup>16</sup>

One feature common to both Palestrina and Victoria in these two prints is a preference for unequally-cleffed choirs. Four of Palestrina's pieces contrast a high choir, containing two sopranos, with a low one containing two tenors. Victoria's approach is similar but different: all four pieces contrast a high CCAT choir with a standard CATB one. The use of three soprano voice-parts reflects Victoria's general preference for high sonorities. Both Palestrina and Victoria were experimenting with the new idiom, looking for new solutions to the challenge of setting extended sectional texts such as psalms and Marian antiphons; their responses during this period were somewhat different.

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<sup>14</sup> PALESTRINA, Giovanni Pierluigi. *Motettorum 5,6,8vv, liber tertius*, Venice, Gerolamo Scotto, 1575.

<sup>15</sup> VICTORIA, Tomás Luis de. *Liber primus qui missas, psalmos, Magnificat 4-6,8vv*, Venice, Angelo Gardano, 1576.

<sup>16</sup> K. Fischer, *Die Psalmkompositionen in Rom um 1600 (ca. 1570-1630)*, Regensburg, Tutzing, 1979, pp. 324-332.

Victoria continued to publish double-choir settings: in 1581 he added a further five psalms or Marian antiphon settings. Now, there is a change, with four of the five pieces having standard CATB clefs in both choirs; only *Laudate Pueri* continues the high choir/standard choir contrast; it is also the only one of the five pieces to have separate sections for three and four voices and not to have independent bass lines. In this it resembles more his 1576 pieces. In the other four settings Victoria has moved closer to the model set by Palestrina's 1575 pieces, one which was to become the norm for Rome-based composers from then until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century: it featured equally-cleffed choirs, independent bass lines which avoided the fifth of the harmony, and continual antiphonal fragmentation of the text between the choirs, without reduced-voice sections.

Palestrina published only one further polychoral piece during his lifetime, *Vos amici mei estis* in an anthology of 1592.<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that he ceased composing in the idiom, of course: many pieces survive in manuscript, including manuscripts contemporary with the composer. In the late 1570s and early 1580s two further Rome-based composers, Annibale Zoilo and Jean de Macque, began to have music for two and three choirs copied into Roman manuscripts, though these were not published. They show different stylistic features from Palestrina and Victoria: they both use a lot of exact antiphonal repetition, using almost total homophony in choral blocks and avoiding contrapuntal writing.<sup>18</sup> This was most likely a result of increased physical separation of the choirs. An example is Macque's double-choir *Regina coeli*, shown in Example 7. Pieces like this also make much use of the placing of syllables on crotchets (quarter notes,) in the style of contemporary *note nere* madrigals. This was to become standard in the following generation of Rome-based composers, now all Italians: Luca Marenzio, Ruggero Giovanelli, Asprilio Pacelli, Annibale Stabile, Felice Anerio, Giovanni Francesco Anerio, Francesco Soriano, Paolo Quagliati and others.<sup>19</sup> While Palestrina almost entirely avoided these newer developments we do find them in works published by Victoria in 1583 and 1585; the younger composer was in a better position to adapt to new ideas. In the 1580s Victoria's ability to publish regularly allows us to follow changes in his style. From this we see that he was sensitive to such changes which may have occurred as a result of knowledge of the works of Zoilo and Macque.

We can see this new approach in Example 8, taken from the setting of some verses from the Corpus Christi sequence, *Lauda Sion*, published by Victoria in 1585, shortly before leaving Rome;<sup>20</sup> it can also be seen in his setting of the Litany of Loreto published in 1583.<sup>21</sup> The most ambitious polychoral piece published by Victoria in these years was his triple-choir setting of the Vespers psalm *Laetatus sum*, presumably intended for performance at a large-scale patronal Vespers celebration. It was the earliest piece for three choirs to be published by a Rome-based composer.<sup>22</sup> This setting is in many ways both a culmination and a synthesis of Victoria's work in the polychoral idiom, while pointing the way forward to the next generation. He returned to uneven cleffing, making his second choir a high-cleffed one with two sopranos. He also returned to sectionalising the text, using individual choirs for

<sup>17</sup> *Psalmi, Motects, Magnificat, et antiphona, Salve Regina diversorum auctorum, octo vocibus coninenda, selecta a Jo[anni] Luca Conforti*, Rome, Francesco Coattino, 1592.

<sup>18</sup> O'REGAN, *Sacred Polychoral*, pp. 179-184.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>20</sup> VICTORIA, Tomás Luis de. *Motecta Festorum Totius Anni, cum Communi Sanctorum 4,5,6,8vv*, Rome, Alessandro Gradano, 1585.

<sup>21</sup> VICTORIA, Tomás Luis de. *Motecta, 4,5,6,8,12vv*, Rome, Alessandro Gardano, 1583.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

particular verses and including one verse for just three voices. At the same time it shows up-to-date features such as writing for homophonic blocks, occasional syllables on crotchets and frequent cadences in verses set for all three choirs.

How are we, then, to judge Victoria's contribution to the early Roman polychoral idiom? Would it have developed differently if Victoria had not been in Rome in those years? The short answer is probably not: although Victoria played an important part, he was not an innovator in this field. Animuccia had laid the building blocks in his pieces which must have been composed some time before their publication in 1570. Once these had appeared, Victoria and Palestrina were both quick off the mark in developing these techniques in what may be seen as the experimental decade of the 1570s. Of the two, Victoria held out longest against what can be retrospectively seen as a process of standardisation of the idiom into writing for two equal choirs which could be placed on platforms at some distance from each other. He continued to favour contrasting registers in the choirs, regular changes in texture which might involve voices taken across the choirs, sectionalisation of verses and the employment of reduced numbers of voices for some verses. All this allowed him to respond more effectively to the text. In his continuing liking for sectionalisation Victoria's music would in fact have been a better template than that of Palestrina for early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Rome-based composers. They were to mix the polychoral idiom with the small-scale concertato one to produce a synthesis sometimes described as 'concertato alla romana' which favoured division into contrasting sections over homogeneity.<sup>23</sup> In this respect Victoria can be seen as preserving something of the legacy of Animuccia's 1570 pieces and transmitting them to the generation which followed him.

In terms of the types of text set for multiple choirs, Victoria was the first to use the idiom for Vespers psalms, presumably reflecting the needs of the Collegio Germanico and its associated church of S. Apollinare. He also used it for the four Marian antiphons sung at the end of Compline, perhaps following the example of Palestrina who had published a setting of the *Ave Regina* in his *Motettorum* 5,6,8vv, *liber tertius* of 1575. One of Victoria's major legacies was his introduction of the polychoral idiom in the musically-important Collegio Germanico where it was to flourish under his successors like Annibale Stabile, Asprilio Pacelli, Ruggiero Giovanelli, Agostino Agazzari and others. Victoria also helped his younger Rome-based Italian Francesco Soriano, by publishing his Gospel dialogue *In illo tempore* in his *Motecta festorum totius anni cum communi sanctorum*, 4–6, 8vv of 1585. In all of these ways, Victoria did play a major part in the success that Roman polychoral music was to enjoy for more or less two centuries after the first compositions in the idiom in the 1570s.

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<sup>23</sup> DIXON, Graham. «Concertato alla romana and polychoral music in Rome». *La scuola polichorale romana del sei-settecento (Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi in memoria di Laurence Feininger. Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio, 4-5 ottobre 1996)*, Francesco Luisi, Danilo Curti e Marco Gozzi (eds.), Trent, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Servizio Beni librari e archivistici, 1997, pp. 129-134.